Ted Shawn Papers 1923-1964
MS25

Finding aid prepared by Megan Dwyre

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections
November, 2006
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Summary Information

Repository	Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections
Title	Ted Shawn Papers
Date	1923-1964
Extent	0.5 Linear feet 1 box
Language	English
Abstract	The Ted Shawn Papers is a relatively small collection of undated photographs pertaining to his career as dancer and instructor. Although the collection consists mostly of photographs, it also includes his two published books, Fundamentals of A Dance Education (1937) and Dance We Must (1946). Many of the materials in the Ted Shawn Collection are autographed and inscribed to Rebecca Harris, who was a dancer at Jacob's Pillow, Ted Shawn's dance retreat in the 1950s. Also included is a collection of miscellaneous ephemera related to Shawn and his wife, Ruth St. Denis.

Biographical/Historical note

Modern dance pioneer, Ted Shawn, was born Edwin Myers Shawn on October 21, 1891, in Kansas City, Missouri. While studying theology in college, Shawn was temporarily paralyzed as a result of diphtheria, and began dancing as a form of therapy to strengthen his legs. He soon realized he wanted to pursue dancing as a career, and after studying ballroom dance and ballet in Denver, Colorado, Shawn moved to Los Angeles and opened a dance studio with his dancing partner, Norma Gould. While touring in New York, Shawn met Ruth St. Denis (1878-1968), and they married shortly after, on August 13, 1914. Although they were married for over fifty years, they only lived together for about fourteen. Both dancers formed the Denishawn dance school and dance troupe in 1915. The Denishawn Company taught and performed a variety of dance types, but the group was best known for their modern and thematic dance styles. Several legendary dancers including Martha Graham, Charles Weidman, and Doris Humphrey were Denishawn members.

In 1932, the Denishawn Company disbanded, and Shawn and St. Denis decided to pursue separate careers. Hoping to change America's opinion of male dancers and legitimize dance as a career for men, he formed an all male dance group and toured the country from 1933-1940. In need of a place to rehearse, Shawn purchased "Jacob's Pillow," a mountain top farm in Becket, Massachusetts. He transformed the farm into a dance retreat, and subsequently founded the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival and University of Dance, the first intensive summer dance program in the United States.

Shawn dedicated a great deal of time to dance education and scholarship. He wrote many books and articles on dance history and technique, and taught and lectured at institutions across the country. He also made one of the first dance motion pictures, "Dancing of the Ages," in 1912. In addition to his work as an educator and writer, Shawn continued to direct at Jacob's Pillow until his death in Orlando, Florida on January 9, 1972.

Scope and Contents note

The Ted Shawn Collection is a small collection with many undated photographs. Shawn's writings and materials relate primarily to his 50-year wedding anniversary with St. Denis, which constitutes a large part of the collection.

Arrangement note

I. Photographs The bulk of this series consists of what appear to be early photographs of Ruth St. Denis, none of which are dated. The small photographs show St. Denis in a variety of costumes and dance poses. In this series, there is also a homemade card titled “Three Old Timers,” containing photographs of Shawn, St. Denis, and dancer La Meri. There are also several larger undated photographs of St. Denis.

II. Ted Shawn Writings (1937- 1946) This series consists of writings by Ted Shawn including two published books, Fundamentals of a Dance Education (1937), and Dance We Must (1946), which is inscribed to Rebecca Harris. Also part of the series is an undated autographed pamphlet entitled “Credo.” The writings focus on the history of dance, dance styles, and choreography, as well as Shawn’s personal beliefs and philosophy of dance.

III. Ephemera (1940-1964) This series consists of miscellaneous ephemera. The bulk of the series is made up of materials relating to Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn’s fiftieth anniversary celebration. The series includes two pamphlets detailing the relationship of the couple, and a commemorative coin inscribed with the pair’s portraits. The series also contains ephemera relating to St. Denis including an autographed biographical booklet and a recital program.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections November, 2006

Revision Description

Entered into Archivist's Toolkit by Joan M. Wolk. September, 2015

Conditions Governing Access

Unrestricted, open by appointment.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Many of the materials in the Ted Shawn Collection are autographed and inscribed to Rebecca Harris. In the 1950s, Rebecca Harris was a dancer at Jacob’s Pillow, Ted Shawn’s dance retreat.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Denishawn School of Dancing.
- Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.
- Jacob's Pillow.

Genre(s)

- Ballet
- Ballroom dancing
- dancing (activity)
- Male dancers
- photographs
- Writings

Personal Name(s)

- Gould, Norma, 1888-1980
- Harris, Rebecca
- Shawn, Edwin M., 1891-1972
- Shawn, Ted, 1891-1972
- St. Denis, Ruth, 1880-1968

Collection Inventory

Series I: Photographs	**Box** 1	**Folder** 1-2
	Box	**Folder**
Handmade card with photographs, “Three Old Timers,” 1923-1925	1	1
5 later photographs of Ruth St. Denis, undated	1	2
Series II: Ted Shawn Writings (1937-1946)	**Box** 1	**Folder** 3-4
	Box	**Folder**
Fundamentals of a Dance Education, 1937	1	3
		Box
Dance We Must, 1946		1
	Box	**Folder**
“Credo,” undated	1	4
Series III: Ephemera (1940-1964)	**Box** 1	**Folder** 5-9
	Box	**Folder**
Christmas Greeting Card from Ted Shawn, 1940	1	5
Program from Ruth St. Denis recital, 1946	1	6

“The Golden Book of Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn,” 1964	1	7
50-year anniversary pamphlet, 1964 Gold anniversary commemorative coin, 1964	1	8
Biographical booklet on Ruth St. Denis, 2 copies, undated	1	9